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STARRY FLAG WEEKLY

THRILLING STORIES OF OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

THE FIRST GUN

OR HAL MAYNARD'S STRONG COMMAND



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BY DOUGLAS WELLS

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THE FIRST GUN; OR, HAL MAYNARD'S STRONG COMMAND.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

HAL'S GREAT CHANCE.

Click, click, clacketty-clack!

The sound came from the telegraph instrument in a room belonging to the commandant at Key West.

Click-clack, click-clack, clacketty-clack-clack! Zip!

"Coming fast and hot," laughed a sergeant standing outside under the window. "Must be a hot message. Sounds as if some one were mad."

"Yes," replied the soldier stationed here as a sentinel. "Some one is mad."

"How do you know?" questioned the sergeant.

"Used to be an operator myself."

"And you know what is tapped out inside now?"

"Yes."

"Hope its orders for us to start to Cuba," sighed the sergeant, looking out over the harbor.

The sentinel was silent.

"I suppose if it was anything of that

nature," insinuated the sergeant, "you would give a fellow a hint?"

"No," responded the sentinel, promptly.

"Wouldn't, eh?"

"No, sergeant. Whatever comes over the wire is none of my business."

"You're all right, Browning," said the sergeant, heartily. "In a campaign the soldier who knows when to keep his mouth shut is the chap who is likely to get some promotion when favors are going around. To change the subject a little, did you notice that as soon as you said you knew what the message was they walked out of sight?"

As he spoke the sergeant nodded toward two young men who now halted a distance of some hundred feet.

"I noticed them," replied Private Browning. "They are certainly discreet."

"Carry themselves like soldiers, too," remarked the sergeant.

"They are."

"Oh, you know them?"

"I know who they are. The taller one

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is Lieutenant Maynard; the shorter one is Lieutenant Ramirez."

"Officers? What regiment?"

"They belong to the Cuban army. Came over here I heard to bring the pilots that took the fleet down to Havana."

"They look like good stuff," said the sergeant, frankly.

"They probably are, for one of the Cuban generals selected them to bring over some important papers, as well as the pilots."

"They've had better luck than we have, then," sighed the sergeant, "for they've seen action in the field. Are they credited with a big exploits?"

"So I understand; but not from them. They're not given to blowing their own trumpets. But you can see that they're only boys, and boys don't earn lieutenant's commissions unless they do something for them."

Inside, the wire was still clicking hotly.

It was a long message that was coming over. For some minutes the operator wrote busily, at last gathering up the sheets of the dispatch and taking them into the commandant's room.

Here, besides that officer, two others were seated in deep, earnest consultation.

At the appearance of the operator, however, the talk ceased.

Hastily the commandant ran his eyes over the written pages.

By the time that he looked up the operator was gone.

"It's off," remarked the commandant, frowning.

"What is?"

"Albertson's mission to Cuba."

"The deuce!" murmured one of the listeners, while the other whistled softly.

"It looks," said the commandant, dryly, "as if Albertson had been saying a few words too much. The newspaper

correspondents here got an inkling of his business in Cuba."

"I can't believe that Albertson divulged the secret," protested one of the group.

"It wouldn't have leaked out if he had said nothing," retorted the commandant, crisply. "The newspaper men know at least that he is going to Cuba, and on an important mission. They have telegraphed their representatives at Washington to get the whole story. One reporter actually had the cheek to telegraph the Secretary of War, asking permission to accompany Lieutenant Albertson. That was what set the department up in arms. Here is what the adjutant-general has to say: 'An officer who takes the newspaper reporters into his confidence when starting on a delicate mission is not fit to be trusted with such important matters.' And so Albertson is relieved from the duty."

"He'll be heartbroken."

"I agree with the Washington people that he should have known enough to hold his tongue. But there is something else that is bothering me. The adjutant-general asks me to nominate some other officer—one who can hold his tongues, and who is as well qualified in other way, as Albertson was. Now, whom can I name?"

"Cowan?"

"He doesn't speak Spanish."

"Smithson?"

"Too hot-headed."

"Clark."

"He might talk."

"Now how would one of those young men answer the purpose?" questioned one of the trio, who had risen and walked over to the window.

As the commandant joined him he pointed to the two young lieutenants who had just been discussed by the sentinel.

"They're not officers," objected the commandant, quickly.

"But they are Cuban officers, splendid fellows, and ones who can be trusted."

"By Jupiter!" cried the commandant, "I begin to see something in your idea. The Cuban is, of course, out of the question, but Maynard is an American. Now, if he is willing to undertake the work, it wouldn't take two hours, over in Washington, to appoint him a second lieutenant in the United States army. That done, he could handle the mission better than any of our officers here. Major, what do you think of Maynard? He is brave, certainly."

"And cool as ice, I believe."

"He speaks Spanish, too."

"And knows the Cuban woods."

"By Jupiter, he is the very man, if the Washington people are satisfied with him."

"They are likely to be, since they left the selection of the officer to your discretion."

"I will sound Maynard first. If he says 'yes,' I will telegraph his nomination to Washington."

"If you wish, sir, I will go out and ask him to come in here."

"Do so, major. But remember that I wish to see only him."

In less than a minute Hal Maynard stood in the commandant's presence. They were now the only two in the room.

"Mr. Maynard," began the commandant, at the same time looking over the young man with a long, penetrating look, "do you feel that you are at liberty to serve in the United States army? I ask that because I take it for granted that you enlisted in Cuba's forces."

"I am at liberty, sir," responded Hal. "When we started in this direction Ramirez and I were told that if circumstances or inclination led us to join the

American troops, instead of returning to our former posts, we were at liberty to do so."

"You are a Cuban lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir," came proudly from Hal, as he drew out his commission signed by General Betancourt.

"Would you enlist as a private in the United States army?"

"Yes, sir."

"Despite the fact that you are a commissioned officer in another service?"

"Despite that fact, sir."

"Why?"

As he fired this brief interrogatory, the commandant looked at Hal more keenly than ever.

"I would go as a private in the American army," replied Hal, "because I am an American. While I love the Cubans, the first place for me is under the flag of my own country."

"Well spoken," nodded the commandant. "Now, if you are willing to enlist as a private, I need hardly ask you whether you would serve as a second lieutenant?"

"What is that, sir?" cried Hal, springing to his feet.

For a moment his face was suffused with joy, but his look swiftly became one of incredulity.

"I mean it," said the commandant, in a way that caused the look of joy to return to the youth's face. "What is your answer?"

"There can be but one answer to such a question. Such an appointment would make me the happiest youngster in America."

"You would have to go to Cuba."

"I expected to, anyway, at the first opportunity."

"You would have a long, rough journey."

"I believe I am well seasoned, sir,"

smiled Hal, glancing down at his lithe, wiry, hardened body.

"You would be in great danger every instant on the way."

"It is there, sir, that one who is used to fighting with the Cubans feels most at home."

"The greatest results for the United States will depend upon the success of your mission," went on the commandant.

"Now," rejoined Hal, "you make me hesitate."

"And why?"

"Because, sir, if it is such responsible work I cannot but feel that some older, more experienced officer could do better."

"I know something of your reputation, Maynard, and I have been studying you since you came into this room. I believe you will perform the mission excellently for us. If you accept, I will telegraph the proposition to Washington. All will then depend upon the answer which I receive. In the meantime, you will say nothing of our conversation?"

"Certainly not, sir. But I have one question yet to ask you."

"Ask it at once, then. Be brief, for time is precious."

"It is about my friend, Juan Ramirez. He and I are comrades. We are pledged to stand together. Whatever luck befalls one must come to both. One does not go where the other does not."

"You don't expect him to be appointed a lieutenant in the American army, do you?" demanded the commandant, looking annoyed.

"I should hesitate to go without Ramirez," spoke up Hal, firmly. "It would be a violation of our comradeship. Nor could I ask him to go with me, except on a footing of equality."

"It is impossible," was the answer.

"Not being an American citizen, Ramirez could not receive a commission from the president."

Disappointed but steadfast, Hal rose as if to take his leave, first inquiring:

"Have you anything more to say to me, sir?"

"You will not go unless you can take Ramirez on an equal footing?"

"I cannot, sir."

"Then you guessed rightly. I have nothing more to say. Good-morning, Mr. Maynard."

CHAPTER II.

THE COMMANDANT CLEARS THE WAY.

As Hal, after bowing, stepped across the room, the commandant called after him:

"You will say nothing about our interview?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Nor give any hints?"

"Not a hint, sir. I have promised you that, and I never go back on my word."

Once more Hal turned toward the door.

"Oh, er—er—er, Maynard, come back a moment."

Wheeling around with military precision of movement, Hal regained the commandant's side in exactly the same number of steps he had taken to go from there to the door. Trifles count, and this American officer noticed Hal's soldierly amount of method with a sensation of pleasure.

"When are you going back to Cuba, Maynard?"

"I am not certain, sir, that I shall go back."

"Surely, with all the enthusiasm that must have led you into their ranks in the first place, you are not now tired of serving them?"

"No, sir; but I can serve the Cubans equally well either in their own ranks or in those of the United States. The two flags will wave side by side. Cuba's cause is Uncle Sam's, just as Uncle Sam's quarrel will always henceforth be Cuba's. But I confess that I would rather serve under my own flag than that of the closest ally."

"What, then, of your friend, Ramirez?"

"He will enlist in the United States army with me."

"If he is actuated by the same feelings that you are, Maynard, I should think he would want to get back with Gomez."

"The case is different, sir. The Cubans are so grateful to this country for its friendly support that any Cuban would be as happy serving under the Stars and Stripes as under the Lone Star of Cuba. General Gomez has himself proclaimed that Cubans who enlist in the American army are serving Cuba as well as if under her own flag. So Ramirez, who knows my feelings, urges me to go in under Old Glory, and he will follow me."

"I should like to see this Ramirez," mused the commandant, aloud.

"He will be entirely at your service, sir. You saw him three days ago, when we both reported to you, after coming ashore from the fleet just before it sailed."

"I did not notice him much then, Maynard. To tell the truth, Maynard, I did not notice you particularly, either. I was interested in you only because you were an American under the Cuban flag. You made me think of the son of a friend of mine, young Osgood,* who died a

hero's death in the Cuban service." Hal bowed, standing at attention as if undecided whether he was again dismissed or not.

"Is Ramirez near at hand?" continued the commandant.

"He is waiting, sir, in the yard outside."

"Will you ask him to come in?"

"Certainly, sir."

About face went Hal, and vanished through the doorway.

"Just eleven steps," mused the commandant. "He took eleven steps both times before. A real soldier, that lad."

Back came Hal, with Juan in tow.

"Eleven steps each," pondered the commandant.

Then he came at once to business.

"Mr. Ramirez, I have offered your friend the prospect of a commission in the American army."

"Is it so?" asked Juan, tranquilly.

"And he declines."

"For a good reason, I am sure," protested Ramirez.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because," was the Cuban's answer, "although my friend is a dashing soldier in action, yet he is so prudent that he never does anything without the best of reasons."

"Shall I tell you why he declined?" pursued the commandant.

"If you will honor me with your confidence," was the Cuban's deferential response.

"But I have no doubt, though, that you can get the information direct from Maynard."

At this insinuation, which was meant only in the way of quizzing, Hal flushed.

Juan's eyes flashed as he drew himself up stiffly.

"Senor Commandante, my friend will

* The young Osgood here referred to was the son of Major H. B. Osgood, U. S. A., and, as the latter has a splendid Indian fighting record, the son came of emphatically good military stock. Young Osgood, who was serving under Gomez at the time of his death, was a splendid gunner, who had, by gallantry, attained the rank of major in the Cuban insurgent army.

Editor.

tell me nothing, unless you have left him at liberty to do so."

"Decidedly," murmured the American officer, "I would like to have both of these young men under me."

But aloud he said:

"Ramirez, I have asked your friend to accept a commission in the United States army because I wished to send him on a mission that can be intrusted only to an American officer."

"Is it a commission of great importance?" queried Ramirez.

"Of the greatest importance."

"Then he will accept, have no fear," replied Juan, placidly.

"On the contrary, he has already refused."

"I can think of no reason, Senor Commandante, unless it was on my account."

"And there you have hit it, my young Cuban. In short, Maynard has refused the commission because you cannot hope to receive a similar commission."

"Our compact of friendship was to that effect," suggested Juan.

"Yet, if he would accept, it would be greatly to the benefit of the United States and Cuba."

"In that case," quoth Juan, "I will try to persuade him. My friend," turning to Hal, "do not refuse on my account. When either the United States or Cuba can be benefited by the breaking of our agreement, it is your duty to break it. When both the United States and Cuba can be benefited, it becomes a paramount duty."

Though it was seldom that Hal hesitated, his face now showed that he was dubious.

"Confound us all," ejaculated the commander, impatiently.

"Mr. Ramirez is already a lieutenant in Cuba's army. Now, if he goes with you as a Cuban officer—to which there

can be no objection—why is he not your equal, Mr. Maynard?"

"That is true," cried Hal, his face brightening.

"And you accept my offer?" demanded the commandant.

"I not only accept, but I thank you heartily for clearing the way for me to accept."

"And you won't change your mind later?"

"Do I impress you as belonging to that kind of people?" asked our hero.

"No, candidly, you don't, my boy," responded the commandant, rising and shaking hands with each. "Now, take a run outside, for I must get the wires hot. We shall see whether Washington will back up my offer. If Washington approves, I shall send for you alone, Maynard, for only the officer who goes in charge can be permitted to know the nature of the errand."

In the act of departing, Hal made his best bow, but Juan surpassed him by bending nearly double.

"What do you think of the chance?" whispered Hal, as soon as they reached the corridor outside.

"It is a glorious opportunity for you. I fear, mi amigo, that you did unwisely to refuse in the first place."

"It was only because I objected to going unless you went, too, and on an equal footing."

"A difficulty which has been happily obviated."

Meanwhile, the wires between Key West and Washington were in incessant use.

An orderly sought Hal at the expiration of two hours.

"You are wanted at once at headquarters," was the message.

"Success," whispered Juan, squeezing

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his comrade's hand, and patting him, Cuban fashion, on the shoulder.

"Shall I come in, sir?" asked Hal, pausing in the doorway of the headquarter's office.

"By all means."

As Hal walked across the floor to the desk he saw that the American officer was looking up at the ceiling with a thoughtful air.

Yet out of the corner of his eyes the commandant was watching our hero, and saw that he again required exactly eleven steps to cross the floor.

"Confound you!" grinned the commandant.

"Eh?" queried the boy.

"Let us come to business. In the first place, you are appointed second lieutenant in the regular United States army. I have only to swear you in, furnish you with a uniform provided by some subaltern of your own size, and you are ready for the work."

A lieutenant of United States regulars!

That thought sent the blood coursing more swiftly through Hal Maynard's veins, brought the flush of pleasure to his face and the glad tears of patriotism to his eyes.

Turning swiftly, he rose and went over to a window from which he could see the proud bunting of Old Glory floating over the parade ground.

With head uncovered, Hal reverently saluted the flag—an action which certainly did not lower him in the older officer's respect.

"I am ready for your orders, sir," said Hal, coming back.

"Here are papers drawn up by me which will explain fully what is needed. But I will say that you are to land at a point a little east of Matanzas. The officer who commands the boat that will take you to Cuba has his orders as to the

place of landing. You will have twenty regular cavalrymen under your command, since, though I do not want you to fight if you can avoid it, yet I do not wish you to be so unprotected that you would be in danger of falling into Spanish hands. You are to reach General Gomez with the greatest speed. Now, how will you do it?"

"If you leave that part to my discretion, sir, I shall proceed as quickly as possible to the headquarters of General Betancourt, the Cuban officer who commands in Matanzas province. He will tell me exactly where General Gomez is. Betancourt will also provide me with an additional escort, besides sending out mounted scouts ahead of my party, to either flank and at the rear, in order to give me prompt notice of the presence of any Spanish force in my path. In that way, you may be sure that I shall reach General Gomez safely and with the least delay."

"You have given me a very clear-headed plan, lieutenant. Now pay particular attention to the nature of your mission. The United States proposes to do three things. It will first seize the port of Matanzas, which, as you know, is not far from Havana. It will then use Matanzas, first as a base from which to send arms to General Gomez, so that he can put a larger army of Cubans in the field. The United States will also send food to stop the starvation of the Cuban *pacificos*. We shall expect the Cuba army to assist in the distribution of the food.

"Now, you will find out from General Gomez just how many rifles and how much ammunition he will need for the new recruits he can raise. You will also find out just what assistance he can give in the distribution of the food. As to further instructions, study thoroughly the papers which I have given you."

"Last of all, I will speak as to the method of reaching the Cuban coast. Over in the harbor the navy dispatch boat Everglade has steam up. Aboard of her, besides the crew, are twenty United States cavalrymen and their horses. The minute you go aboard and hand this note to Ensign Howes, he will start the Everglade for Cuba. Now, my young friend, take this other note to my adjutant, who will see that you are fitted out with uniform and sword. Good-by, and remember how much is depending on you."

As Hal, after saluting, started to leave the room, Key West's commandant turned his head to look out of the window.

He could not endure, this time, to count our hero's footsteps.

But as that proud and happy latest commissioned officer in the United States regulars trod over the floor, his heels tapped off a message distinctly audible to the commandant.

Eleven!

CHAPTER III.

AMERICA'S FIRST TROOPS IN CUBA.

"Tell Mr. Maynard that we are nearing the Cuban coast."

Ensign Howes gave this order to a sailor who promptly departed.

To those on the deck of the Everglade the vague line of Cuba's coast hills was now visible through the darkness.

After receiving the summons, our hero did not delay more than two minutes his appearance on deck.

Those two minutes were consumed in putting away about his own person the papers that fully explained the details of his mission to General Gomez.

Those papers he had read and re-read all the way from Key West to Cuba. He had read them until he knew their contents by heart.

"You have been absorbed, mi amigo," observed Juan. "You have shut yourself up ever since we left the harbor of Key West."

"Pardon me, old chap, but, as you say, I have been genuinely busy and could not help neglecting you. But now for a brisk ride though the country. Though Uncle Sam would not furnish you with a commission, he has furnished you with a thoroughbred horse to ride for the next few days."

Ahead were grouped the twenty cavalrymen who were now under our hero's orders for the business in hand.

Going among them, Hal gave them orders, in a quiet tone, to go down in the hold where their horses were, and prepare the animals to be led ashore.

Silently saluting, these splendidly disciplined fellows filed below without either hurry or lagging.

"Do you land at once, Mr. Maynard?" inquired Ensign Howes, joining them.

"That depends somewhat upon your orders," answered Hal. "How long can you stay here?"

"My orders allow me to suit your convenience, provided only that I get well out at sea before daylight. I must take no risk of capture."

"You can give me an hour, then?"

"Very near twice that length of time, if it will serve you, Mr. Maynard."

"It will serve me greatly. With such a small command as I have, and instructions against doing any unnecessary fighting, I want to be reasonably sure that the road is free of the enemy before debarking my men."

"Let me be the first to go ashore, then," begged Juan, eagerly.

"You volunteer?" asked Hal.

"Most certainly."

"There is no one who can do the work so well as you," replied Hal, heartily.

Are You a Patriotic Boy? Read True Blue.

"If you signal back that the coast is clear, I shall not need to hesitate an instant about ferrying my men ashore."

"I shall scout most thoroughly; depend upon me," declared Ramirez. "As soon as I am satisfied that all is well, I will reach some elevation of ground and move a light three times up and down. When you see that signal, land without fear, but not until then."

"Heaven speed you, old chap," cried Hal, fervently wringing his chum's hand. "Take care of yourself, too. This would be a lonesome campaign for me if I lost your comradeship."

Almost without noise a boat had been lowered, and now, with a crew of four men and a coxswain, came alongside the side gangway.

Juan stepped over the side, dropping into the stern sheets. A push, and the men bent to their oars, soon disappearing in the darkness.

After a few minutes the boat came back, without Raimrez.

Arm in arm, Hal and the ensign paced the deck, keeping their gaze steadfastly shoreward.

"You are quite devoted, you and the Cuban," observed Howes.

"With good cause, at least on my part," responded Hal. "Ramirez saved my life in Havana on the same day that Consul-General Lee sailed away and left me the only real American in Havana."

"You had known him before that day?"

"Never saw him before that time. Can you imagine why he risked his own life to save me?"

"Liked your appearance, perhaps."

"Possibly, but that wasn't his reason. He served me because I was an American. You can see how strong the Cuban affection is for the people who have helped them in their struggle."

"Wonderful," confessed Howes, pulling vigorously at his cigar.

"So I left Havana with him," continued Maynard, "and together we struck out for the nearest Cuban camp. All along my heart had been with the Cubans. Next to my own flag I am anxious to serve them."

"Raimrez seems to worship you."

"If he does, his feeling for me is no stronger than mine for him. To see him go under would be as bitter as to lose a brother."

Both stopped here to observe a light that twinkled on shore.

Up and down it moved, three times.

"Ramirez!" cried Hal.

"And the coast is clear."

"We will debark at once, then, Mr. Howes."

A quick order, promptly carried out, resulted in the launching of a flat-bottomed scow that had been brought along for the purpose.

In this craft it was proposed to take the horses, three at a time, to the shore of the little cove at the mouth of which the Everglade now lay.

"Sergeant," hailed Hal, in a low voice, as he bent over the hatchway of the hold.

"Yes, sir!"

"Come on deck with six men."

"Yes, sir."

In a minute the seven men stood before their young commander, saluting.

"Sergeant, I want you to go ashore in a small boat. Land and throw out your men in such a way as to protect our landing against possible surprise."

"Yes, sir."

By the time that the sergeant had received these instructions a small boat was alongside to receive the advance landing party.

Then followed busy, even if prosaic, times on board the Everglade.

All hands that could be spared among the sailors assisted the soldiers in the work of transferring the timorous horses from the vessel's deck to that of the scow.

Three at a time the animals were sent ashore.

With the first three went Hal, after shaking hands with Ensign Howes.

"All well, mi amigo," whispered Juan, coming forward eagerly to meet our hero as he stepped to the beach.

"No sign of enemies, eh?"

"Not near at hand. Of course at Matanzas, which is but a few miles to the eastward, there are thousands of Spanish troops."

"And what we have most to fear," rejoined Hal, "is discovery by small bands of patrols."

"Bah!" grunted Juan. "With the splendid regulars that you have at your back we could whip a hundred such patrol parties."

"But if one man from a patrol got away, and returned with a sufficient force of the enemy, it would, to say the least, be very serious business."

"Ha!" smiled Juan. "If I did not know your splendid courage so well I should think you afraid—you are so cautious."

"There is a big difference between cowardice and caution," replied Maynard, quietly.

"As splendidly proved by yourself," returned Juan.

"Did you see the general orders issued at Key West this morning?" smiled Hal.

"I did not."

"Those orders strictly prohibit all bouquet throwing."

Juan looked puzzled for a few moments, before the force of this American slang dawned upon him.

"By Jupiter!" thrilled Hal, suddenly,

pointing out over the water. "What is that?"

"It is moving," returned Juan, in a whisper.

"An animal—doubtless a human one."

"It's a head."

"And of a spy!" Hal was alert in an instant.

"That fellow will reach shore in an instant. Thunder! I must head him off. Sergeant, take care of these papers of mine."

As Hal spoke, he thrust the packet into Sergeant Brown's hands.

His next move carried him toward one of the horses which stood ready for work.

"I will go with you, mi amigo," uttered Juan.

"No; stay here."

Chug! chug! sounded the hoofs of Hal's mount as that animal pounded the soil.

Juan sprang toward another horse, but Sergeant Brown stepped in his way.

"Where are you going, sir?"

"To the support of my friend."

"Did you not hear Lieutenant Maynard's orders to stay here?"

"Pooh! He would keep me out of danger which I would share with him."

"Pardon me, Mr. Ramirez, but we are all under the lieutenant's orders."

"I am going after him," insisted Ramirez.

"If you attempt it, sir, I shall have to place you under arrest."

Very wide indeed did Juan open his eyes at this. He was getting his first personal taste of the strict discipline of the United States regulars.

Meanwhile, Hal was second man in a furious chase.

No sooner had he seen that head moving in a straight line from the Everglade to the shore than he divined that a Spanish spy, having succeeded in stowing

himself away at Key West, was now headed for the shore, bent upon carrying warning to the nearest Spanish military commander.

At the first sound of galloping, the man in the water knew that discovery and pursuit were upon him.

Hal had some distance to go around the bend of the cove; the Spaniard was not more than a few yards from the beach.

How he swam! All his strength was now exerted, bringing him to the shore with a few frantic strokes.

On his feet—up and off! Like the wind ran that Spaniard, leaving Hal Maynard much more than a hundred yards to the rear.

"On, old chap! You've got to go!" breathed Hal Maynard, bending low over his horse's neck. "Uncle Sam's glory lies in the swiftness of your feet!"

Man against horse! Not always is the race to the latter, as Maynard soon found.

"That rascal must have winged feet!" muttered our hero, digging his spurs in deeper than ever. "Jupiter! how he sprints!"

Looking backward over his shoulder, the Spaniard seemed to put on a fresh spurt.

Both pursuer and pursued were now headed along a road that led gradually away from the water.

Fast as the fugitive went, however, Hal was confident of catching him.

"He'll run and get winded," breathed the young lieutenant. "So will my horse. When that happens, I can jump to the ground and start in fresh. Hello—blazes!"

For the road turned, and the Spaniard, still in the lead, was now out of sight.

"If he takes to the woods," gritted Hal, "my job will be to guess which way he went. Eh?"

Hal reined up with a yank. Behind a tree lurked the Spaniard, coolly drawing a bead upon our hero.

Only the second after discovery he fired. The shot missed Maynard's head by only a couple of inches.

Hal's revolver was in his hand, ready. Quick as a flash he raised it.

Whizz! Like a boomerang it hurtled through the air. Chug! The bottom of the butt landed forcefully between the fellow's eyes.

Down went Spain, vanquished by a trick old to the Cubans.

Hal's splendidly trained horse stood still.

Out of saddle sprang the young lieutenant, bending over his fallen foe.

"Stunned—and hard, too!" gritted the boy. "'Twon't do to be slack, though."

In a jiffy he had the spy's hands lashed together. The feet were done an instant later, followed by the inwedging of a gag.

Tap-tap! tap-tap! tap-tap! came the sound from up the road.

"Horsemen? Blazes!" vibrated Hal.

It took him but a few seconds to run his horse in well under the trees. Then, sabre and revolver in hand, with the Spaniard's weapon thrust into his belt, Hal waited and watched.

On came the enemy, seven in number—a cavalry sergeant followed by six mounted Spanish soldiers.

Squarely in front of Hal, less than thirty feet away, the squad halted.

"I cannot have been deceived," muttered the sergeant, turning to his two foremost men. "It was a shot that we heard. We will ride forward slowly until we learn the meaning of it."

But from a trot the horses now moved at a mere amble. There was no fun in being ambushed at night!

No man could have been more alert than that Spanish sergeant.

Three or four times, in the next same number of minutes, he halted his men.

"Oh! Ah! Car-r-r-r-ramba!" suddenly growled the sergeant, halting his squad just within sight of the cove.

Though the darkness of the night was not conducive to good vision, the sergeant could see quite enough to startle him.

"Car-r-r-r-ramba!" he repeated, passionately. "Queer work is going on here! A steamer, and men landing something from it. I thought the Cuban snakes had abandoned filibustering, now that the Yankee pigs are openly helping them to carry on the war."

Then, suddenly recollecting his duty in the matter, the sergeant wheeled about.

Ere his men could follow him—before the sergeant himself had ridden six feet, there was a sudden commotion in the bushes around them.

"Submit, or die!" came the startling summons in Hal Maynard's ringing voice—a summons backed up by a dozen rifles in the hands of United States regulars.

CHAPTER IV.

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!"

"Car-r-r-r-ramba!" uttered the astounded sergeant.

"Well," demanded Hal, coolly, "have you surrendered."

"Per Bacco! Never!" growled the sergeant. "It is not the way that Spain's sons fight."

"Very well," jeered Hal. "Fight, then. He who raises his hand to use a weapon dies."

The surprise was too complete, the "drop" too perfect for even desperate action.

Sullenly the Spanish soldiers slid out of their saddles, one after the other.

"Very good," admitted Hal. "Now drop your weapons, and stand under guard."

It was galling to obey, but death to refuse. Three minutes later Hal marched down upon the beach with his prisoners.

Picking out three of his men to accompany him, our hero dashed quickly up the road.

The capture of the patrol squad thrilled him with delight, though the young lieutenant was forced to admit that, had the Spanish sergeant moved his men more quickly, their capture might not have occurred.

To get back in time, Hal had been forced to leave the spy in the woods.

That rascal had not escaped, however, in the interim. He lay just as his captor had left him.

Dismounting, Hal severed the lashings around the fellow's feet.

"I wonder if you could run fast?" mused Hal aloud, while he lifted the spy to his feet and started toward the road with him. Pierson, hold this fellow a minute."

While the private grabbed the spy by the collar, Maynard sprang into saddle. Over the pommel a lariat was coiled.

Hal slowly uncoiled this. The spy, facing in another direction, did not witness the proceeding.

"Got him headed toward Matanzas, Pierson?" hailed Lieutenant Hal.

"Yes, sir."

"I want to see him make good time. Turn him loose!"

Though he could hardly believe his ears, the Spaniard gave a leap the instant he felt himself released.

His rest had not destroyed his sprinting powers. He flew like a thing of steam.

After him pelted Hal. Whish! It was a clean, swift, straight throw.

Over the spy's neck the noose fastened, a terrifying omen of what fate held in store for him.

So well was it thrown, so skilfully drawn tight, that the spy did not lose his balance, but halted, standing sullenly in the middle of the road.

What a world of hate there was in his eyes as he glared at this masterful young lieutenant!

"Now listen to me, my man," said Hal, sternly. "You can run well enough when you want to. If you keep up with my horse you'll travel to the beach on your feet. If you try to drag, you'll coast on your back, with more or less strain on your neck. Come along!"

Hal started his horse at a trot, the spy keeping at his side, while behind rode the three troopers.

In this order they reached the beach. Hal surveyed the result of his work with a good deal of grim pleasure.

"Seven Spanish horses, seven prisoners of war, and one spy," he chuckled. "Not a bad consignment to ship to Uncle Sam, and best of all without a shot fired."

In twenty minutes the last of the horses and prisoners was aboard the Everglade, which lost no time in steaming out to sea.

"Those soldiers are fortunate," smiled Juan. "They will be well fed, will have no fighting to do, and will go back to Spain, sleek and happy, at the end of the war."

"I find myself almost pitying that spy," put in Hal. "He can look forward to nothing but a hanging."

"And now, mi amigo?" questioned Juan.

"Our work lies before us."

"You will want a guide."

"And am fortunate to have one in you. Juan, I will ask you to go ahead with two of the men. Whenever the road

changes, leave one man at the turn to notify us."

Juan saluted, adding:

"Thus will your advance be safe. But the rear, mi amigo?"

"I shall have two men well at the rear. We shall be safe against all but ambush. Of that we must take our chances."

After Juan, accompanied by the two regular troopers had galloped off, Hal waited a full minute before giving the word to start.

Meanwhile, he detailed two of the best of his men with these orders:

"Give us a full minute's start. Then follow. At the first sign of the enemy, one of you ride forward to report to me, while the other will come on at the speed that circumstances dictate."

A night of hard riding resulted in covering twenty miles before daybreak.

At first sign of the dawn Hal halted his command in a sheltered ravine.

Breakfast was in order, but first of all the young lieutenant posted six vedettes at points each two hundred yards from camp.

This done, breakfast was eaten with a feeling of security in the heart of the enemy's country.

In a half an hour the command went forward again, Juan and the two scouts keeping well to the fore, while another pair safeguarded the rear.

Five miles were covered in this fashion when one of the advance guard rode furiously back.

"There is a cross-roads just ahead, lieutenant," reported the soldier. "It crosses this road at right angles. On that road a Spanish column is approaching. When I left the head of the column was a quarter of a mile from the junction."

"The number of the enemy?" demanded Hal.

"About fifty horsemen; probably two hundred infantry."

"Ride back. Ask Mr. Ramirez to get under shelter."

As the soldier rode off, Hal dispatched a man back to the rear guard, then moved his main command forward at a gallop.

The junction of the road was not far off. Before the first Spaniard came in sight, Hal's command sat grouped under the trees where they could not be seen from the road.

Only Hal and Juan, leaving their horses under the charge of troopers, stole close to the road.

Lying flat on the ground, screened by bushes, the two boys saw the Spanish cavalry ride into sight.

"Careless rascals," whispered Hal, in his comrade's ear. "They have no advance guard out."

Right behind the cavalry marched the infantry.

Hal looked into Juan's eyes, the latter nodding. Both understood the meaning of the scene. Captain General Blanco, now that he had the Yankees to fight as well as the Cubans, was moving every detachment of Spanish soldiers from interior points toward the coast. These soldiers now passing were doubtless bound for Matanzas.

"What sport it would be to attack them," whispered Juan. "When they saw Uncle Sam's regulars, they would believe that the whole Yankee army was at hand. Panic would give their hearts and their feet the same speed. Try it, mi amigo. It would be rare sport to see a Spanish column run from a score of Yankee soldiers!"

Hal's head swayed a resolute negative.

"My orders, you know, Juan. No unnecessary fighting."

"Yet you would be sure to win. The Americans you command are brave fel-

lows who would ride into the very jaws of death. But there would be little danger this time, for panic would do more than Yankee bullets to set our enemies running."

"My orders forbid it," repeated Hal.

"There is no danger," insisted Juan.

"There will always be danger," rejoined Maynard, "when American officers learn to disregard their orders."

Newest officer of Uncle Sam though he was, the spirit of the United States army spoke in Hal Maynard when he uttered those words.

American history would have been different were our officers heedless of their orders. There have been exceptions, it is true, but these exceptions are at the root of what few blunders have been made in our century of campaigns.

"Well, the column is past," sighed Juan, as the last Spanish soldier trudged out of sight. "We can go on our way unmolested."

"I must wait a few minutes," replied Hal. "These fellows had no advance guard, but are we equally sure that they have no men at the rear?"

It was not very long after Hal had spoken that the roll of wheels was borne to their ears.

"A carriage?" grunted Juan. "Who can ride over wheels in these stirring times?"

"Waiting will answer our question," smiled Hal.

"Here comes the vehicle now."

In silence both boys watched.

A Spanish soldier sat on the box. In the vehicle itself rode four officers, one of them, on the rear seat, being a colonel.

That worthy, as he rode along, surveyed some papers spread on his knee, while the other three officers gave close attention.

"General Blanco," smiled the colonel,

"will welcome these papers. Our fellow who procured them served three months with the Cuban army. He was a clever rogue, and well paid, as you may guess."

"Jupiter!" blazed Hal. "If Blanco wants those papers, General Miles might want them, too!"

Less than a minute later Lieutenant Hal Maynard's command struck the road at a sharp trot.

Jarring on the air came a thunderous shout of:

"Remember the Maine!"

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

HAL'S PRECIPICE.

"Remember the Maine!"

The sternest battle cry that the world has known!

As it rang out in that Cuban forest the thunder of hoofs prefaced the storm of hostility that was soon to break.

Eyes flashed, breath came hard. Uncle Sam's troopers took tighter grip of the hilts of their sabres as their horses tore along the road.

In those few swift moments a great change came over the occupants of the carriage.

The colonel thrust his delightful papers into this pocket. The captain opposite him leaped to his feet, steadying his hands on the door, for the driver had whipped his horses into a run.

A glance told the captain that the squad in pursuit were not Cubans.

"The Yankee pigs!" he shouted, staring with eyes that threatened to bulge from their sockets.

"Drive faster!" roared the colonel, even before he turned around for a look at the pursuers.

But the jaded beasts were making the best speed they were capable of.

"American soldiers?" gasped the colonel. "We are already invaded, then?"

His Spanish mind could not grasp the idea that anything less than an army of Yankees was in Cuba.

"My men ahead will run into a snare," he faltered. "Captain, you persuaded me that we did not need an advance guard, and now we are ambushed."

"There is no firing ahead, as yet," replied the captain, who was beginning to recover his nerve.

"Charge!" shouted Hal, riding at the head of his men.

There was a wild hurrah as the American horses broke into their best speed, then again the ringing shout:

"Remember the Maine!"

"Now, why can't the accursed Yankees stop thinking of their Maine?" growled the Spanish colonel.

But Americans never will forget the Maine!

Sabres flashed in the sunlight as the detachment gained upon the carriage. Not a fire-arm was drawn, so perfect was the discipline of these splendid troopers.

"They are not going to fire upon us," cried the major, in the colonel's party.

"They do not dare to, the pigs!" jeered the young Spanish lieutenant, who had but lately left his home in sunny Valencia to join the forces in Cuba.

Hal had his sabre drawn. There was no time to sheath it on that wild ride.

Catching it between his teeth, he uncoiled the lariat that hung at his saddle's pommel.

Nearer! Every second saw a foot gained on the carriage.

As pursuers closed in upon pursued, Hal swung the lariat.

Swish! With unerring precision, Hal Maynard threw the noose over the Span-

A NAVAL CADET UNDER FIRE—SEE TRUE BLUE.

ish colonel's head, just as the fight opened in earnest.

Back! Hal's horse stopped short, falling almost on its haunches.

For a second only the raw-hide line strained. It was of too good material to break.

Carriage and colonel parted company, the latter performing a by no means graceful curve as he plunged through the air, landing flop upon the ground.

All around the heads of the American troopers a hail of lead passed.

But the Spaniards were so badly rattled that not a shot took serious effect.

As for Hal, he halted short with his somewhat distinguished prisoner, the detachment riding to right and left around him and keeping on in chase.

Badly shaken up, Hal's prisoner still lay in the road when our hero dismounted and knelt beside him.

"You accursed Yankee pig!" grunted the captive.

"All the compliments of the season to you," retorted Hal, jeeringly. "And now to business—no, don't try to sit up if you want to live!"

For the colonel, while trying to get at the sword that was under him, had also attempted to get upon his feet.

He desisted as soon as he found himself glancing down the polished steel tube of a cavalry revolver.

"You impudent pig!" he bellowed, but lay down again in the road.

"I haven't much to say to you," jibed Hal, "but I want those papers. I mean to have them!"

"What papers?" queried the Spaniard, trying to look surprised.

"The papers which gave you so much pleasure in the anticipation of the delight they would afford General Blanco."

"I have no such papers."

"Don't lie to me. I mean to have them

promptly, or I shall blow the top of your head off!"

"And is this the way the boastful Yankees treat prisoners of war?"

The colonel's tone was triumphant, as if he felt he had scored a point.

But he found Hal hard as iron.

"Submit thoroughly, and you shall have no cause to complain of your treatment. Trifle with me and you do it at your own great cost. For you should know, colonel, that I served with the Cubans before entering the American army."

"I have some papers, but did not think them of great value," confessed the prisoner, who, gazing into Hal's face, saw stern lines forming around the young American's mouth.

"Doubtless they are the papers I want," rejoined Hal. "Produce them."

"Certainly," cringed the Spaniard. "But may I first sit up, Senor Lieutenant?"

"Yes," accorded Hal, briefly.

No sooner had his back left the dust than the Spaniard accommodatingly thrust one hand inside his coat.

He fumbled there slowly, Hal watching him with lynx-eyed vigilance.

"No, none of that!" interposed our hero, swiftly detecting the nature of the move. "If you handle that knife too quickly, colonel, you will need a new top on your head. Now do the thing properly by drawing the knife out an inch at a time. Lay it carefully on the ground, remembering that I am a pupil of the Cubans in the matter of quick shooting."

Fuming, cursing, the Spaniard obeyed.

"Now," persisted relentless Hal, "the papers. Consult your safety by not making any mistake this time."

There was much more low-toned cursing before the Spaniard deposited in one

of Hal's outstretched hands two folded documents.

"The rest of the papers," ordered Maynard.

"There are no more."

"The rest of them, sir!"

"I have no more, I tell you."

"You lie!"

Under the Spaniard's brown skin the white heat of anger appeared.

But Hal remained immovable.

"Come, come, colonel, I have already wasted upon you more time than I should give a general. If you treat me with such scant politeness I shall be sorry for my patience. It is a fault that I can quickly remedy. The rest of the papers within five seconds, or—"

Hal did not finish. The slow rising of the hammer of his revolver was eloquent with meaning.

The colonel saw it, knew that his life now hung by a slender thread.

Sweating with fear and humiliation, he thrust his hand into his pocket, bringing out two more documents.

"Thank you," said Hal, stiffly.

"Mi amigo," softly breathed Juan, who had come up behind our hero, "how did you know that this dog had more spurs?"

"I didn't exactly know it," smiled Hal, signing to two of his returned troopers to take charge of the colonel. "I only guessed it. My threat worked, however, as you see."

"Oh, I begin to understand, mi amigo," smiled Ramirez. "Your threat, then, was what you Yankees call a precipice."

"Well, something of the sort," laughed Hal, though the word we generally employ is 'bluff.' "

Fifty yards away Sergeant Brown had halted the detachment.

Without the loss of a man, without so

much as a painful wound being sustained, America's soldiers had captured the trio of fire-eating but poor-shooting Spanish officers.

Stripped of their arms, they now lay sullenly back on the cushions of the carriage, while beside the Spanish soldier-driver on the box sat one of Hal's men.

"Dump this dog in the baggage wagon also," ordered Hal. "Wait a minute, though. Search through all of his pockets first. He may have more papers."

Though he cursed, the Spaniard was forced to submit. Still another document was brought to light.

"I called you a liar a moment ago," said Hal, looking squarely into the colonel's eyes. "It is a poor business for the victor to insult his unfortunate foe. Had it not been that you have proven yourself a liar twice over, I would feel obliged to apologize to you for my rudeness. As it is, allow me to assure you of my well-grounded contempt."

Into the carriage climbed the colonel, while a mounted soldier was placed on either side as guard.

Reforming his men, Hal gave the order to move.

It was full time that they did so, for the Spanish column ahead, warned by the shots, was now hurrying back over the road.

As Hal's men started, the first of the infantry of the enemy appeared in sight.

"Stay and give those brave fellows your insults," jeered the blazing colonel.

But Hal, unheeding him, gave the order to gallop.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A TRAP.

Twenty minutes of hard riding put the little American command past the danger of being overtaken.

True, the Spanish cavalry, by hard

riding, might have come up with the, to them, detested Yankees, but this would take them away from the support of their infantry—a proposition that the Spanish captain of horse apparently did not care to entertain. With advance and rear guards out once more, Hal now gave the order to slow down to the usual trot of a forced march.

After a few minutes, however, our hero, digging spurs into the flanks of his mount, rode forward and overtook Ramírez.

"Juan, my dear fellow, how much further do you think we must go before we overtake General Betancourt?"

"He covers the whole province of Matanzas," was the Cuban's answer.

"As I am quite well aware, my boy, having served under him. But do you not know of some one in this neighborhood whom you can find and get the information?"

Juan slowly shook his head.

"The horses are becoming badly fagged," continued Maynard. "Ten miles more of this work will show their finish. We will wait until the main detachment comes up, and then order a halt for two hours."

This was done, the horses being eased of their saddles and put out to browse.

Yet Hal, accustomed to the battle surprises of the Cuban woods, did not fail to post half of his men at different points to give timely warning of any approach.

During that halt the Spaniard, who proved to be Colonel Zomaya, spent much of his time by glaring ferociously at the soldier who, with loaded carbine over his shoulder, paced around the carriage.

Finally, however, he shifted his regard to Hal.

"Come here, you pig," he ordered, insolently.

"Speaking to me?" laughed Hal, amused by the other's impotent rage.

"Of course," was the retort, followed by the sneering addition: "To be sure I should have specified which pig I wanted to see."

"Your pleasure, colonel?" asked Maynard, ignoring the insult that was intended to provoke him.

"You are brutal," said Zomaya roughly. "While you rest the horse you do not give the same privilege to human beings."

"What do you wish?"

"We all of us need to leave this carriage, that we may walk about and exercise our legs."

"Sergeant," called Hal, and Brown came up.

"Let these prisoners out, one by one, ten minutes for each. Have a soldier walk just behind the prisoner who exercises, and instruct him to be vigilant."

Brown saluted, and turned to a soldier who stepped up.

"I refuse, on any such terms," put in Zomaya, haughtily.

"Very well, then," retorted Hal, turning upon his heel.

Sergeant Brown followed our hero saluting and saying, respectfully:

"Lieutenant, sir, I wish you'd let me discipline that haughty braggart a trifle. It's roiling our boys to see you take such insulting cheap talk."

"Does it worry you?" queried Hal good-naturedly.

Sergeant Brown's answer was prompt and to the point.

"It does, lieutenant, and it makes the boys mad. They're getting up to boiling pitch. I've been an enlisted man in the army for twenty-five years, lieutenant, and I know when the boys are getting to the danger point, no matter how quiet they may appear on the surface."

"Do you know, sergeant, why Zomaya talks to me as he does? Let me tell you. It's something like the plan the Spaniards were discussing a year ago, in the event of war with the United States. They were talking about landing an army of twenty thousand men in Florida. From there, their idea was to march upon Washington and capture it."

A broad grin appeared on Brown's face.

"Now, sergeant," went on the young lieutenant, "Zomaya's impertinence is a piece off the same goods."

"I'm afraid I don't see the point," replied Brown, slowly, and scratching his head.

"Well, the point is right here," quoth Lieutenant Hal, his eyes twinkling. "The Spanish don't know any better!"

"Lieutenant," cried the sergeant, straightening up and saluting with far more than ordinary respect, "you're a wise young man. I admire you, sir, for your patience."

"If the men are meditating anything unsoldierly," went on Hal, "talk to them quietly and prevent a disturbance."

"I'll do better than that, sir, with your permission," chuckled Sergeant Brown, with another salute. "I'll tell them your story."

Which he did, and with presumably good effect, for within two minutes broad grins were the fashion in that little camp.

There was risk in this long halt, yet without such rest the command would soon have been unable to go further.

At the end of the two hours both horses and men were in much better condition to go forward.

With the same precautions as before, Lieutenant Hal resumed the march.

Perhaps five miles had been made when the detachment struck a long, sloping road which terminated in a hill.

Here, from where Hal rode, he could see both advance and rear guard.

"Thunder!" he suddenly muttered. "What's wrong?"

For Juan and the two soldiers ahead had reached the crest of the hill.

Only an instant did they loiter there before turning their horses' heads to ride back some fifty feet.

Halting again, they made frantic signals.

"Danger!" read Hal, from Juan's earnest signals. "Sergeant, bring the detachment along at the same speed, unless I signal you either to hasten forward or turn and ride back."

As soon as he had issued this order, Hal set spurs to his horse.

Never did soldier sit with a better seat in saddle than Lieutenant Maynard did now. Behind him trailed clouds of dust, which did not, however, blind his admiring men to the superb horsemanship he had learned in the Cuban service.

Sergeant Brown, in particular, nodded his approval.

"I've been a yellow leg for twenty-five years," he muttered, glancing down at the broad yellow cavalry stripe that adorned his trouser's leg, "but I never served under a likelier youngster, nor do I want to."

Ramirez had already dismounted, handing his bridle to one of the pair of troopers with him.

Flat in the dust at the top of the hill lay the little Cuban, gazing at what was beyond with shrewd eyes that lost no detail.

Nearing his chum, Hal dismounted, hurrying forward and crouching near him.

"What's wrong, old chap?" he queried.

"Spaniards," whispered Juan.

"They always were wrong," quoth Hal, blithely.

"Mi amigo, this is no laughing matter."

"Blazes!" uttered Hal. "When my Cuban friend sees more Spaniards than he wants to, things are radically wrong."

"Look," muttered Juan, sententiously.

Hal glanced over the top of the hill and down the road on the other side.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, a look of deep anxiety settling on his face.

"We are in a trap, mi amigo."

"I should say so," grumbled Hal, whitening.

What he saw was fully six hundred Spanish infantry coming up the hill.

They had left the road, deploying into the fields in skirmishing order.

In either flank, and considerably in advance, were fifty Spanish cavalrymen all riding hard.

"They saw the Yankee uniform. They are crazy!" mumbled Ramirez.

"Seven hundred men against twenty," discovered Hal making swift estimate of the enemy. "That's tough odds against even Uncle Sam's regulars."

Then he straightened up, his eyes flashing.

"Tough as it is," he ejaculated, "we'll do something!"

"Too late to retreat," warned Juan. "The flanking cavalry of the enemy will prevent that."

"I've no orders to retreat," flared back Hal. "My orders are to go forward!"

"Bueno!" (good) cheered Juan.

"There's only a choice between fight and surrender," went on Hal Maynard, swiftly.

He ran back to his horse mounted rode to the crest of the hill, Juan also returning to saddle and joining his chum.

Up came the regulars on a brisk trot. Hal's uplifted sabre halted them.

"My men," cried Hal, pointing ahead, "there are the enemy. They are on our flanks, too. There is only a choice between fighting and surrender. To fight means to die; to surrender means months, perhaps, in Spanish dungeons. Which do you choose?"

Like a peal of thunder came back the cheering answer:

"Fight!"

"Good! I was sure of you!"

Colonel Zomaya and his companions stared hard in utter amazement.

Were these Yankees mad, to ride to instant death?

"We shall soon change places, señor!" jeered the colonel.

But Hal paid no attention to him. He was quietly surveying both his own men and the enemy.

"Unsling your carbines," he commanded, quietly. "Be ready for the order to fire. At close range let the carbines hang and be ready to draw sabres."

Quietly, and with the precision of clockwork, the men obeyed.

By this time the battle line of the Spaniards was a quarter of a mile away.

"Unless they fire," said Hal, "I shall let them cover up half the distance. If they fire, we must open the charge while they are still aiming their pieces.

"Now, my men, I have something serious to say to you. Of course we all know that we cannot win. Yet it is possible that at least one man will be able to ride through the line to the other side.

"Sergeant, if I fall, you will take my papers, and try to ride on with them. If you fall, let the work depend upon the man nearest you. Whoever gets through the Spanish line alive, if one there be who does, he must not stop riding until he can place the papers in General Gomez's hands."

Two lines of nodding heads confronted Hal.

"I can trust every one of you in this scrimmage, I am sure," added Hal.

"Shure," growled Corporal Casey, "ye can depind upon regulars to foight at the drop av the handkercher, an' foight until the handkercher covers the dead Spaniard's face!"

Quiet and determined sat that score of men. When the word came forward, it would be to ride to death, but what did they care? The bullet is the soldier's lot!

Below the hill on either side the Spanish cavalry had now galloped to the rear of the little American detachment.

"They want to ride up behind us," smiled Hal. "Too bad! We shan't be here when they arrive!"

Hal's eyes now told him that the correct distance intervened between his own men and the Spanish front.

Like pistol shots the young lieutenant's sharp commands rang out:

"Forward! Trot! gallop! charge! Fire at will!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAKES OF WAR.

With a ringing cheer the men followed. Five yards ahead of the sergeant rode Hal, Juan close at our hero's side.

Just before giving the order to fire Hal swerved to the right flank, his chum following.

Crack! rang the rifles. It was wild work. There was death in every volley,

for these men of Uncle Sam's, who had learned their work in Indian campaigns, were splendid sharpshooters.

Every man fired but one, the private perched beside the Spanish driver on the box of the vehicle containing the prisoners.

This vehicle kept close behind the line of galloping horsemen, while the guard on the box sat so that he could give equal attention to the driver and the officers behind.

Not a shot came up the road from the enemy.

The Spanish, bred in different traditions, followed their invariable course against a charge of cavalry.

Like magic their skirmish line closed up.

With bayonets fixed, they knelt to form the hollow square.

"Fire at will," was still the order with the rushing horsemen.

Their magazine carbines were fitted for firing twenty shots a minute.

Before the impact many a Spanish soldier bit the dust.

Behind the hollow square a cloud of dust rose.

It came nearer, passed the square. Four horses were swiftly detached and led to the rear, while a dozen men sprang around the machine thus left in position.

"Jupiter!" breathed Hal.

The machine now trained on them was a Gatling gun.

Swift as thought it went into action, raining bullets at the Yankees at the rate of several hundred per minute.

Chugging the ground, these balls raised a tremendous cloud of dust, and at first that was all they did do.

Sergeant Brown had led half of the command to the left, the rest following Hal to the right.

The carriage now alone occupied the road in front of the Gatling fire.

On the box sat the soldier, still with his eyes on those directly under his charge, ready like any one of Uncle Sam's heroes to die at his post.

"Jump!" roared Hal, looking back. "Never mind the prisoners."

That order, sounding above the Gat-

ling's barking, came barely in the nick of time.

Without the loss of a second, the private leaped to the ground.

As he sprang, his hat fell behind him. Before it touched the ground, a bullet from the Gatling passed through it.

Like clods both horses attached to the carriage fell to the earth.

The driver, jumping wildly down, was riddled, expiring before he had time to moan.

Through the carriage tore the fire of the devastating Gatling gun.

Ere the prisoners in it had time to rise and show their uniforms they were drilled through and through.

Nothing lived in the path of that fearful machine gun.

Lying straight out on their horses' backs the regulars continued their charge, still firing, still scoring!

"Cease firing!" shouted Hal. "Sling carbines! Draw sabres! At them, boys!"

Barely a hundred yards now separated the American troopers from the hollow square.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

A stirring, rousing American cheer, that! It was the same cheer that has often led our men on to brilliant victory.

It now carried this handful of gritty Americans to no less brilliant death!

Hal fell back on the extreme right of his line.

At his right rose Juan, now standing in his stirrups, swinging his formidable machete.

Bang!

Between the two lines, fast closing in, flew a sudden deadly fire.

Fifty rifles must have spoken. There was time to fire but a single volley.

None save sharpshooters would have dared chance that single volley, for it was fired against the troops of Spain, and Cubans were behind the guns that flashed.

"Viva Cuba libre!"

White uniforms swarmed out of the nearest woods as the Cuban patriots' battle cry smote the air.

"Viva Cuba libre!"

A hundred throats grew hoarse with

the yell as Uncle Sam's allies sprang into the fight.

Back came the answering American slogan:

"Remember the Maine!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

Just back of the now useless but still barking Gatling, Sergeant Brown led his half of the detachment close to Hal's.

Once more the command was reunited.

With the valor of a whole troop of cavalry, this score of riders fell upon the nearest hollow square, hacking, slashing, shooting.

Bang!

Upon the left of the Spaniards another raking volley came.

"Viva Cuba libre!"

Out of another patch of woods rushed another company of Cubans.

Yet the Spaniards held their ground, some firing, some depending upon the abatis of bayonets provided by the hollow square.

Up on the crest of the hill appeared the cavalry sent to attack the Americans in the rear.

Their commander looked down, saw what was happening, and halted his men.

"Al machete!"

Over all the din of carnage that smote the air rose that cry most dreaded by the Spanish troops in Cuba.

"Al machete!"

It was the battle-cry of Cuban cavalry-men.

Wherever it is heard, it presages a charge of the wildest description.

It means the touch of cold steel, for the Cuban cavalry never fire as they ride, but depend upon the slashing, crushing work they can do with their fearful machetes.

Cuban first fighting is all infantry work. Never do the cavalry ride upon the scene until the day is gained for Cuba.

It is the task of the cavalry to pursue and cut down the fugitives of the enemy.

"Al machete!"

It is the yell that freezes all the blood in a Spanish soldier's veins.

Nor did they wait, on this occasion, to face the wild rush of Cuban cavalry.

"Save who can!"

That despairing shout set the retreat in motion.

Attacked at once on all sides, there was little choice of direction in which to run.

It was helter-skelter, pell-mell flight.

One company, commanded by a Spanish captain of superior courage, refused to budge.

Crouching men, with bayonets fixed, formed the outer line of the hollow square.

Inside, a second line fired fast and furious over the heads of their kneeling comrades.

Forming his men in one platoon, with sabre and pistol drawn, Hal led them forward against the nearest side of the square.

Back from the fringe of glistening bayonets shied the horses.

Uncle Sam's regulars were now in broken line. Cuban horsemen rushed to their support.

In between the blue coats appeared white coats.

Cuba and Uncle Sam were fighting together at last!

It was a short, glorious, effective fight.

America's troopers, well supplied with cartridges, speedily broke the hollow square line.

Sorely pressed, dismayed, the Spaniards raised the despairing shout of:

"Save who can!"

Despite the frantic appeals of their captain, they broke and ran, only to be cut down, in most cases, with their backs to the enemy.

The fight was over, superior tactics and strategy winning the day for the allied Americans of the United States and Cuba!

From the top of the hill the Spanish cavalry had disappeared, without firing a shot or striking a blow.

Not caring to pursue fleeing foes, Hal had rallied his command.

It had not escaped unscathed. Four men were wounded—one terribly, and that one was Corporal Casey.

"Ye can't do much for meself," gasped the corporal, whose every word gave him intense pain.

'Clif Faraday Under Fire.' Read True Blue.

Both arms hung limp and useless by his sides, the bones shattered by bullets.

A glancing shot had gouged out one of his eyes, after breaking the bridge of his nose. Another Mauser bullet had plowed through both cheeks. In his left side a bullet was imbedded.

"Ye can't do much for me," he repeated, as he saw Hal's pitying look.

"The Cubans must have a doctor with them. We'll send for him," replied Hal, rising after resting his hand sympathetically on the corporal's forehead.

"If there's a saw-bones around," urged Casey, "save him for the fellies he can do some good. This Casey's done for. I've seen enough men go the same way to know, for I've served west for fourteen year. Lieutenant, darling, I'm proud to have served under a dashing felly like yersilf in me lasht foight. Now, will yez be good enough to ask Jim Brown to stip this way?"

Hal went himself in search of the sergeant, who promptly answered the summons.

"Sergeant," murmured the corporal, whose each succeeding word came more faintly, "ye have me brother Tirince's addriss?"

"I have, Pat Casey, old comrade."

"Wrote him, thin. Tell him phwat's happened me, and thot I was not a bad soldier. Tell—him—its—his—turn—to—come—in—me—place—to—enlist—under—the—Ould Flag!"

Lieutenant Hal was sobbing. The gurgle in doughty old Sergeant Brown's throat was like a knell.

Corporal Casey had paid the stakes of war!

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAFE CONDUCT.

"My young friend, I am delighted to see you!"

"And I, under such circumstances."

Turning, Hal found both hands grasped by Cuban officers.

"Colonel Ragado!" he cried, in genuine delight.

"And Major Alvaredo!" he added, with another thrill of pleasure.

These were the Cuban officers under whom he had served, under whom our hero had struck his first valiant blows for Cuba, under whom he had won his promotion.

"You have left our service, I see," smiled Ragado, thinking how handsome Hal Maynard looked in the blue of Uncle Sam.

"I left to join your allies," responded Hal.

"It was no desertion," protested the colonel. "You have won rank with your own countrymen. It was deserved."

"We were hovering in ambush about the Spanish column when we saw your heroic charge," cried Alvaredo. "We rubbed our eyes when we saw United States soldiers, for we did not know that any had landed in Cuba."

"These few are the only ones that I know of," answered Hal.

"Ah! It is so? Then may I ask how so small a force came to be ashore?"

"My escort. I am on a special mission to General Gomez."

"Is it so? But tell us, my brave young friend, how you came to attack such a Spanish force with a score of soldiers. It was heroic, but reckless. When you served with us we found you more prudent."

"Nothing heroic about it," laughed Hal. "Nor reckless, either. We were doomed to be cut in pieces anyway. We preferred to go down while striking a blow rather than while receiving one."

"It was heroic, anyway," declared Ragado. "We could not believe your twenty men were all that followed you. We thought there must be more behind. Your charge was so dashing that we did not move into the field for fear of hampering the work of United States soldiers. But as soon as we realized that your twenty were all the Americans on hand, then I gave the order to attack."

"And saved us from annihilation," responded Hal, gratefully. "My dear colonel you have enabled me to survive two great events. I had the honor to command the firing of the first American gun in Cuba. I had also the honor of being

the first American Commander who saw his men fight side by side with Cuba's soldiers."

"Your comrade Ramirez?" broke in Alvaredo. "Did he not come with you?"

"Most decidedly he did."

"Here I am," spoke a quiet voice behind the group.

"Ah my dear gallant fellow," cried Alvaredo, turning and embracing Juan. "Why did you not sooner show yourself?"

"I waited, major, until I heard myself inquired for."

Ragado, too, embraced him after the enthusiastic Cuban fashion.

"I report back to your command, major," announced Juan saluting. "Yet with your permission I will continue with my friend so long as he needs a guide through these woods."

"In serving Lieutenant Maynard and his mission you are rendering the best service to Cuba," rejoined the major. "You will report to me only when Lieutenant Maynard has no further need of your company."

"But if you are to find General Gomez," added Ragado, "the surest way will be to go straight to General Betancourt. He will put you in direct communication with our commander-in-chief."

"It was my plan," acknowledged Hal.

"And your mission is from the United States Government? That is, if I am not indiscreet in asking?" queried Ragado.

"In the most direct way from the United States Government," promptly acknowledged Hal.

"Ah!"

"The papers I bear are from the Secretary of War himself."

Ragado's eager eyes showed that he would like to ask more questions, but was deterred by delicacy.

"I would gladly tell you all," went on Hal, "but I am forbidden to speak about the matter to any one but General Gomez."

"Say no more, my young friend. It is of the greatest importance to Cuba, your mission, or you would not be here under such circumstances. Very well, then. You shall see our general as soon as the

thing can be done. Permit me to guarantee it."

"You can tell us where to find General Gomez?"

"I cannot, but perhaps Betancourt can I will take you to Betancourt."

"You?"

"I and my men. Oh, my brave young American, you shall be famously guarded during the rest of your march. Walk or ride, as you please. Do not bother with precautions. Never mind if you stroll away from your arms. On every side you shall be flanked by Cuban soldiers. Our scouts shall hover on your line of march for a radius of miles. Should a Spanish force appear, you shall be warned while it is yet miles away. My entire command will do the scouting, for he who comes to Cuba in the name of Uncle Sam shall have all Cuba to do his friendly bidding if need be."

Ragado was here so affected that he embraced the young American lieutenant.

"One of my men, a corporal, has just died," broke in Hal, his eyes becoming misty again as Casey's heroic end recurred to him. "But there are three others who are less wounded. You have a surgeon?"

"Assuredly, and a fine fellow who joined us after you left."

"Will you ask him, as soon as possible to visit my three wounded men?"

"Lead me to them," requested Ragado while Alvaredo and Juan brought up the rear.

They had not many steps to go.

Hal gave a start of pleasure when he saw the surgeon already at work upon one of the three men.

"You see," smiled Ragado, "that no time has been lost. At the request of my own wounded men the surgeon came here first to attend to the Americans."

"Your corporal is the only loss, señor," spoke the surgeon, looking up at Hal. "These three men, after an hour, will be able to remount their horses if they do not travel too hard. They have bayonet wounds, these two, while the third has a flesh wound from a bullet. Bah! these Spaniards no not know either how to shoot well, or to use their bayonets!"

True to his promise, the surgeon, in an

hour, had all three men in their saddles, though Hal, when re-forming his command, ordered the three to lag at their ease at the rear.

Ragado's men disappeared by tens and twenties, Alvaredo's going off in squads of four, until only fifty of the Cuban infantry and twenty of the Cuban cavalry were left with the Americans.

"For five miles ahead, the same distance behind and two miles on either flank my men are thrown out," announced the colonel. "It will be odd," he added, with twinkling eyes, "if as much as a Spanish fly can get in through our lines. We are sent here to fight, Senor Maynard, but until we have delivered you at General Gomez' camp we shall dodge a fight if the chance for one comes. We can take no risks until your mission is accomplished."

It was toward four o'clock in the afternoon when General Betancourt was encountered, he also being on the march with his men.

"I warmly congratulate you, my young friend," cried that noted warrior, wringing Hal's hand until it ached. "I must thank you for the splendid manner in which you and Ramirez performed the mission on which I sent you to the United States. I am delighted that your own Government has recognized your worth by giving you a command. But I must warn you that you will have to be zealous for promotion, for your friend, Juan, is to be made a captain by General Gomez."

"Not yet," declared Juan, shaking his head positively. "Not until mi amigo is made a captain in the United States forces."

"Nonsense!" greeted Hal.

"It is so," came the stubborn answer. "Did you not refuse promotion yesterday for the same reason?"

"But if," argued Hal, "you can better serve Cuba in a higher position? What then?"

"Ah! Then——"

"Then," broke in Hal, "you will take the promotion. If you refused, you would be an ingrate to Cuba, and a very silly fellow."

Betancourt smiled, as did Ragado and Alvaredo.

Ragado was instructed by his superior to continue as he had been doing—to avoid all conflict that interfered with the safe conduct of our hero to the headquarters of the commander-in-chief.

"But I," added Betancourt, signing to his aides, "must be on the march again. The Spaniards, who fear the coming of the Yankees, are flocking to the coast. Everywhere their columns are marching across the island to the nearest sea-ports. It gives us great pleasure to fall upon them from ambush. I promise you, Senor Maynard, that by the time the first Yankee army gets here it will find less Spaniards to fight than are on the island to-day."

With many salutes and loud vivas, the two columns marched by each other.

Nearly every one of Hal's troopers wore pinned to his blouse a small Cuban flag.

Many of Betancourt's men, on the other hand, wore small copies of the Stars and Stripes.

At dark Hal and his Cuban escort halted for the night.

Only a word from Colonel Ragado was needed to set forty of the Cubans at work in the forest.

Within thirty minutes they had built a small but substantial shelter, covered with the boughs of trees.

Here supper was served to Hal and the Cuban officers, and here they spent the night, the American troopers sleeping the whole night through, while Cuban pickets reached, at intervals, for miles.

It was at the close of the second day after that, at the end of a long, hard march, that Lieutenant Hal Maynard rode through the camp of General Maxim Gomez, the commander-in-chief of the Cuban patriots.

Did ever general of an army have smaller camp? Until Ragado's men arrived, there were not five hundred Cubans there.

"We shall be in sight of the camp in a minute," Ragado had called back to our hero.

Hal's eyes had sparkled with anticipation.

"It is an epoch in the history of the

war," our hero murmured delightedly to Juan, who rode beside him.

Then the young lieutenant glanced back over his troopers, riding in column of twos.

They had heard the news. Like magic they straightened up.

Every man was on his mettle. In an instant their alignment became perfect.

"Whether they parade or fight, these regulars of ours are the most wonderful fellows in the world," murmured Hal, enthusiastically.

Then the column came in sight of the camp, which had already been warned by couriers.

What a yell of welcome rent the air!

"Viva los Estados Unidos!"

"Long live the United States!"

Around the little American detachment the day suddenly became dark. Cuban sombreros tossed wildly up, filled the air. They came down to outstretched hands, only to go once more up.

Scores of barefooted fellows, decorated with the scars of battle, surged about Hal.

"Viva los Estados Unidos!"

The cry was taken up by five hundred throats with a volume of sound that would not have been looked for from less than five thousand.

"Do not force the Yankee officer to ride!" shouted one enthusiastic Cuban. "He should go on our shoulders!"

The suggestion spread with the speed of wildfire.

Those nearest Lieutenant Hal scrambled and fought good naturally for the distinction of being first to lay hands upon him.

"No, no, no!" laughed Hal. "My good friends, I am quite comfortable upon my horse."

But his refusal seemed only to render them more good-naturedly determined.

They surged about, Hal laughingly repulsing them and urging his horse onward.

"He can ride only on our shoulders, this American!" shouted many voices at once.

Nor did they desist until a deep, sonorous voice called:

"How now, my children? Would you unhorse an American soldier?"

They had arrived, scrambling, before headquarters.

It was General Gomez who spoke.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE FIRST GENTLEMAN IN CUBA."

Like mist before the sun, the crowd vanished at first sound of that voice.

Between Hal and General Gomez—a distance of perhaps ten yards—the ground was clear.

Hal had his first view of the first gentleman in Cuba.

General Gomez was no longer young. The cares, anxieties and vexations of three years of the noblest fighting since our own civil war, had told upon him.

Of slight build, the commander-in-chief was worn down to the bone. Yet his carriage was erect, his eyes bright, his bearing indomitable. He was still a man whom fate could not awe.

Dismounting, Hal saluted with deepest respect.

Ragado, also dismounting, presented our hero.

"You have come to a friend," said Gomez, earnestly, as he clasped Maynard's hand between both his own worn hands. "You are welcome both in your own person and as the messenger of the United States."

"He has already wielded a matchete for Cuba, my general," interposed Ragado. "He was one of the brave pair that went on your mission from General Betancourt to Key West."

"I know it," answered Gomez, simply. "I had not forgotten the name, nor that of his comrade, Lieutenant Ramirez. And this young man," turning to Juan, who had lingered in the background, "must be Ramirez."

"Yes, my general."

"You have a lieutenant's commission?"

"Yes, my general."

"It shall be changed to a captain's."

"Pardon, my general, but not before my friend is made a captain at Washington."

Gomez' eyes flashed.

"Do you, my young friend, venture to

HAVE YOU READ TRUE BLUE?

question me when I say that you shall be made a captain?"

Hal managed to catch Juan's eye, dashing an earnest message.

"I—I accept, and thank you, my general," faltered Ramirez.

"That is well," replied Gomez, simply but firmly. "There can be but one voice in the army—mine—even as I obey absolutely the voice of President Masso and the cabinet. You will come to me this evening for your commission."

Ramirez bowed and stepped back.

"Come inside, Senor Maynard," requested Gomez, going as far as the door of his tent, and holding back the flap for Hal to enter. "You will come also, my good Ragado."

Hal briefly stated his mission, then handed over the papers entrusted to him by the commandant at Key West.

"It is what I had expected," cried the Cuban leader. "The Washington Government will furnish our men with rifles."

Ragado uttered an exclamation of delight.

"May I ask how many, my general?"

"As many as we can use, up to fifty thousand."

"We could find, my general, a hundred thousand Cuban men who would take the rifles and use them well."

"Half that number will be enough," replied Gomez. "Especially as the ammunition is to be unlimited. But there is ~~news~~ news as good. The United States will send food enough to feed all our starving *pacificos*. There is only one condition attached to the offer."

"And that, my general?"

"Is that our forces must guarantee the proper delivery of food in the interior."

"And can we not do it?"

"Every pound of food that the Washington Government sends us," cried Gomez, earnestly, "shall find its way to some *pacifico*, or—"

"Well, my general?"

"Or the life of a Cuban soldier shall precede the loss of that pound to the Spanish. That is the reply I shall make. But in looking over the list of things which the United States offers us with so free a hand, I notice one article missing that will be of greatest service to us."

He paused and looked at Hal.

"I fancy you have only to speak, general, of anything that will be of service to Cuba."

"That is true," cried Gomez, and right here Hal saw a sight that few who had stood closest to the commander-in-chief had ever witnessed.

This Spartan hero, who had heard with dry eyes of the heroic death of his own loved son where Maceo fell, now showed misty eyes as he spoke of the friendship of the great sister republic.

"I shall write in my list a requisition that may surprise your resident and his advisers," continued the general, a moment later. "It will be for fifty miles of barbed wire."

Hal's questioning gaze showed his own surprise.

"You cannot understand our need of that?" smiled Gomez.

"I confess, general, that I can't."

"Have you ever seen one of the Spanish trochas?"

"No, general."

"I was sure you had not, or you would know the value of the wire."

Wherever lines of earthworks are thrown up, and topped with bushes to shield the defenders from view, the wire is stretched behind the leaves. In many a battle, when our men have assaulted the trocha, they have been torn upon the concealed barbs. Very well; we shall need barbed wire for our trochas. But I do not need to detain you, Senor Maynard. I shall be working over these papers for hours. If you care to see the camp, Colonel Ragado will show you through it."

"I came near forgetting," spoke Hal, suddenly, "that I had other papers that may interest you."

He drew from one of his pockets the documents he had taken from Colonel Zomaya of the Spanish infantry. Briefly Hal recounted how he had gotten possession of the papers.

General Gomez looked over these captured documents. Then his face became cold, white, hard.

"These papers, Senor Maynard," he exclaimed, "will require my first attention, for they concern treachery in camp."

They prove that there is infamous treason here somewhere, for they explain fully many of our most valuable military secrets. You say that Colonel Zamaya and his companions are dead?"

"I am sure of it, general. They were mowed down by the fire of a Gatling."

"The four officers in the carriage whom you were escorting as prisoners?" asked Ragado, turning to Ha.

"The same."

"Then have no uneasiness."

"You say that?" demanded Gomez.

"Yes, my general, for my men reported that they found all four of the officers dead. Each was riddled with bullets from the Gatling."

"Then these secrets cannot have reached the Spanish lines. For that I thank Heaven. Now, leave me my friends, for I have first the fearful duty of ferreting out the treason here at headquarters."

"What do you think of our general?" asked Ragado, proudly, as he and Hal quitted headquarters.

"Just the man I had expected to see—brave, tireless, pure, just, relentless."

"With those words, Senor Maynard, you have spelled the name Gomez. All of our men who love Cuba love Gomez. The coward dreads him as he does death. The traitor finds no mercy. The luke-warm wins contempt. But to every real patriot General Gomez is a true father."

"There goes an officer toward headquarters," whispered Hal. "And another, and another. Jupiter! Is a council so hastily summoned?"

"You have spoken truly, Senor Hal, for there is the other proof that there is to be a council."

As he spoke, the colonel pointed to a detachment of twenty men marching to headquarters under the leadership of a lieutenant.

"I don't know who they are," confessed Hal, "but they are certainly the dandies of the Cuban army."

"Dandies, maybe," smiled Ragado, "but also the most prized soldiers in our forces. They belong to General Gomez' bodyguard. Some are new in the service, but all have been tested."

No finer-looking body of men could be

imagined. Not one was under five feet eight, nor did one of them weigh less than a hundred and sixty pounds.

Their uniform was of white drilling; on their heads were cream-colored felt sombreros, fastened up in front and bearing a miniature Cuban flag.

Their machetes, both strong and ornamental affairs, hung in solid-looking leather scabbards. At the left also hung a bowie-knife; or the right side a cavalry pistol in holster. Their boots were of dark russet leather laced up the side.

From where they stood near a tree Ragado and Hal escaped observation by the guard.

"See," murmured the colonel. "They stand about the tent with drawn machetes. They themselves are too far from the tent to hear what is said within, and no one else may pass their lines. Though I am a colonel in the army, it would be impossible for me to pass those guards without first sending in word to the general."

But Hal hardly heard him. He was gazing as if fascinated at one particular guard.

Suddenly our hero lowered his eyes.

"I must not look at the fellow too steadily," he murmured, "or he will see that I am studying him."

Then, turning to Ragado:

"Colonel," Hal whispered, "do you see the fellow on the left of the doorway—the one fifth in line?"

"I see him, my friend."

"Will you keep your gaze upon him, without attracting his attention?"

Ragado raised his eyebrows.

"Why?" he interrogated.

But Hal was already gone. He went in search of Juan, whom he found talking with Sergeant Brown on the spot where the American troopers had been quartered.

"Come with me," whispered Hal.

Taking pains not to return to Ragado at once, our hero pointed out to Ramirez the guard who had attracted his attention.

"Have you seen the fellow before?" whispered Hal.

"Yes," positively rejoined Juan. "But where?"

"Can you not think?"

"Not at this moment."

"Try. It is tremendously important." Juan's forehead wrinkled. For some moments he puzzled, but at last exclaimed:

"Of course I remember him. What a short memory I must have!"

Hal glided back to Ragado.

"Colonel," he whispered, "I must have some of the handwriting of that fellow."

"How is it to be had, Senor Maynard?"

"Suppose that you were to offer him pencil and paper, explaining that your hand is sprained. Ask him to write your name, and that of your regiment, that you may send it in to General Gomez."

"And then?"

"Appear to change your mind. Pretend that you will wait, and crumple the paper in your hand."

"I understand, my friend, and yet I don't understand."

"Bring the paper to me. I shall not be here, but not far off. Don't hurry. Pretend to stroll."

Hal spoke so earnestly that Ragado did not doubt his sincerity.

They parted, Hal going to a point where the suspected guard could not see him.

In ten minutes Colonel Ragado found our hero.

"Here is the paper," he whispered.

Hal took it, examined the chirography with a start.

"The same!" he cried.

"Eh?" cried the colonel.

"We will send this writing in to General Gomez," ejaculated the young American officer. "But first I will endorse it."

And Hal wrote across the bottom of the slip, in bold characters, this query:

"Is this the writing of the traitor?"

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAITORS.

"Now," cried Maynard, grim lines settling about his mouth, "it is time for you to send it in to the general."

Colonel Ragado stood aghast.

"A traitor in the general's own guard?" he cried.

"It would seem so," replied Hal. "The writing is the same as that in the

documents I took from the Spanish Colonel, Zomaya."

"You have seen this fellow before?"

"To my sorrow."

"Who is he?"

"A retainer of that arch Spanish loyalist, Senor Vasquez, of Havana."

"His name?"

"Miguel."

"And he is the traitor who would betray Cuban secrets to Blanco!"

"Now, there is where you are going too fast," muttered Hal. "He is not the traitor, for three weeks ago Miguel was in Havana. We heard Colonel Zomaya say that the traitor who sent the secrets had been with the Cubans for three months. Yet Miguel is the one who wrote the documents. Find his confederate, and you will have the greatest traitor. You see, there are two, if not more of them, in camp."

Colonel Ragado was shaking as if with ague.

"This is frightful," he gasped.

"And requires prompt action, colonel."

"True; in my agitation I was forgetting my duty. I shall go to the general at once."

"And if Ramirez and I are wanted, we shall be found over where my men are quartered."

Ragado lost not a moment more in hurrying to headquarters.

Ten minutes later a messenger sought out Hal and Juan. They went at once into the presence of Gomez.

Disarmed, downcast, but defiant, Miguel was there, too.

As the two youths entered, Miguel started and his color fled.

"Ah!" cried General Gomez, fastening his piercing dark eyes on the accused one's face. "So the sight of these young men confuses you?"

"One of them has reason to hate me," replied the prisoner.

"Your name?" insisted General Gomez.

"Pedro Almirante."

"His name in Havana was Miguel," spoke up Hal, promptly.

"Yes," confirmed Juan.

"He was employed—as a cut-throat—by Senor Enrique Vasquez," supplemented our hero.

"Yes," once more corroborated Juan.

"Well," demanded the prisoner, "may a man not be ashamed of his past? May not a Spaniard desert and serve where his convictions lead him—with the Cubans?"

"Undoubtedly," replied General Gomez, "but should a man who has taken the right course be ashamed of his name?"

The accused did not answer, but hung his head.

"Did you write on this paper for Colonel Ragado?" resumed the general.

"Yes."

There was not a change in the steady, quiet inflection of General Gomez' voice as he asked his next question:

"Did you also write the contents of these papers?"

As the Cuban commander-in-chief spoke he brought into sight the documents captured from the Spanish.

Miguel trembled and reeled as if he would fall.

"No!" he screamed. "I never saw those papers before."

"You have hardly had time to examine them?" insisted Gomez, coolly. "Without looking at the papers, how can you be so certain?"

Miguel was now certainly in danger of fainting.

"I thank you, gentlemen," acknowledged Gomez, turning to Hal and Juan, with a signal that told them to withdraw.

Ten minutes later Miguel, stripped of his uniform, was led from the tent. His hands bound, he was escorted by two of the guard.

He disappeared in the direction of the guard-house.

"General Gomez is more than ever delighted with both of you," breathed Colonel Ragado, as he rejoined the chums. "He charged me to say so. Miguel has confessed that he wrote the papers."

"And his confederate?" asked Hal.

"He steadfastly refuses to admit that he had one, although of course it is apparent that he has one. Do you see the priest passing?"

"Yes."

"He goes to prepare the traitor."

"Then——"

"Miguel is to be hanged within one hour," answered the colonel.

Swift is Cuban justice in the field!

"General Gomez invites you to dine with him," went on Ragado, as if glad to change the subject. "But I warn you that he will not be pleased with any reference to the events which have just happened."

It proved a red-letter night for both youths.

General Gomez, divesting himself of his cares, proved a delightful host.

Those who know him best have found that the great Cuban is, in his moment of relaxation, as simple-hearted and joyous as a boy.

Hardly a whit behind their leader, in this respect, were the officers who gathered at his table.

While the evening was still early, Hal left headquarters to return to his own men.

Juan lingered behind to receive his commission, and also some instructions from the commander-in-chief.

Early as the hour was, all of the Cubans, except those on guard duty, had turned in.

Seasoned by more than three years of strife for freedom, these veterans did not need tents. They slept wherever they chose on the ground, without even a blanket under them.

Hal threaded his way through the first groups of sleepers, then reached a considerable open space that lay between him and the quarters of his detachment of United States regulars.

As he skirted a fringe of bushes, our hero heard a sound behind him.

"Juan?" he called, half turning.

Blazing eyes glared into his. A flash of steel passed before Hal's face.

"Blazes!"

Panting, Hal Maynard sprang back.

His assailant leaped after him.

There was not time to call out.

Hal threw up one arm, parrying the thrust meant for his heart.

Slash! The cold steel ripped his sleeve, bringing blood.

Gathering himself, Hal sprang at the fellow.

It was a ruse, but the assassin dodged,

lding the knife's point out for his intended victim to land upon. A ruse well played on our hero's part, Hal, dodging to the other side, landed with all his force under the scoundrel's feet.

Down like a log went the assassin, but the fight was not by any means knocked out of him.

He still held the knife.

Here was our hero's chance to dart off, putting for the guard, but it was not his way of doing business.

Instead, he made a leap, landing with his heels squarely across the fellow's right arm.

"Car-r-r-r-r-rrajo, you fiend!" howled the wretch, whose arm was broken.

"Rough treatment, I know," admitted Hal, striking the fellow a forceful blow on the face as he endeavored to roll over so that he might reach for the knife with his left hand.

"Here is the knife. I'll keep it for you," muttered Maynard, coolly, as he held the blade before the fellow's face.

Now, why did you try to kill me?"

"I mistook you for one of your soldiers, with whom I had a dispute."

"You lie, and I will soon prove it."

Raising his voice, Hal shouted:

"Pass the word for Sergeant Brown!" That veteran trooper soon responded, running at top speed.

"Sergeant, walk this fellow down to camp. Ask our boys if any of them had a dispute with the fellow. They need not be afraid of rebuke. I am anxious to learn the truth for other reasons."

"Come along," gruffed the sergeant, seizing the assassin by the collar and marching him in a way that admitted of no resistance.

The troopers were aroused and shown the prisoner. Each and every one of them denied having had any dispute with the sullen-looking fellow.

"You have lied, as I supposed," cried Hal, contemptuously.

"Who is he, mi amigo?" asked the quiet voice of Juan, as that Cuban stepped up from the rear of the scene.

Leading his chum aside, Hal whispered:

"The partner of Miguel—the traitor who helped Vasquez' man to prepare reports to General Blanco."

"You are sure of that, mi amigo?" murmured Ramirez, opening his eyes to their widest.

"Sure enough, I think," responded Hal. "But it is General Gomez who must look for the evidence and decide. I never saw this scoundrel before. He could have no enmity for me, unless it is because I helped to convict his fellow-plotter. He tried to stab me with this knife. Now, what do you make of the matter?"

Juan's eyes flashed angrily, as he replied:

"There can be no doubt, mi amigo. This fellow is the other plotter—Miguel's fellow-traitor."

A view which the circumstances wholly warranted, for, under severe questioning at headquarters, the prisoner at last broke down and confessed.

He was hanged at sunrise.

[THE END.]

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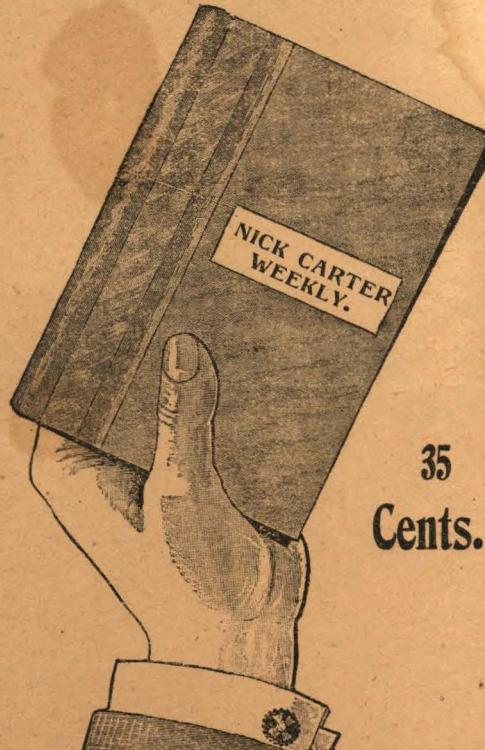
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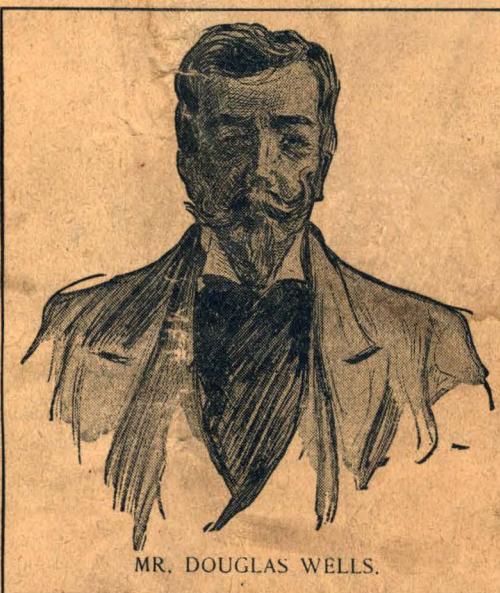
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